



March 5, 2012

Mr. Tony Snyder, President
Michigan State Chapter
National Wild Turkey Federation

Dear Tony,

Thanks for contacting us in regards to the proposed Senate Bill 412. Through our involvement in the restoration and management of the wild turkey in Michigan over the last 30 years, we certainly have a vested interest in the continued management of the species in a scientifically sound and fiscally responsible manner. Michigan is fortunate to be one of only a few states that had the foresight to establish a fund dedicated to the management of the wild turkey. Since the establishment of this funding source nearly 20 years ago, the Michigan DNR has a tremendous track record on using this money to have the greatest impact on wild turkeys and other native wildlife. The flexibility of the law has allowed the wildlife professionals within the agency to direct the use of the money for the maximum benefit.

In regards to your specific question about the impact of diseases on the wild turkey in Michigan, in 40 plus years of being involved with wild turkey management and restoration, rarely has there been a case in which disease was the primary cause of the decline. When that has been the case, it has been evident through the number of reported diseased carcasses. Additionally, when it has occurred, it has been very localized, and normally is the result of disease being transferred from domestic poultry to wild turkeys. Removing artificial food sources is often the first measure that needs to be taken to reduce the risk to wild turkeys. A requirement in SB412 to require annual random testing from the wild turkey population would not add to our knowledge of disease impacts on the population of wild turkeys in Michigan. Sampling of carcasses casually turned in to the state veterinarian, or intense sampling in an area, based on the discretion of the Michigan DNR, when they have reason to believe disease may be impacting the population would be appropriate. Annual testing for the sake of testing is not a wise use of limited resources.

I understand that the wild turkey population in Michigan has recently been on a downward trend. However, since turkey population levels are highly correlated to spring weather, it is not uncommon to see fairly wide fluctuations from year to year. Several years of poor hatches can quickly lead to a downward trend which may take a few years to recover. Many of the Midwestern states are experiencing the same downward trend as Michigan.

National Wild Turkey Federation

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Michigan has maintained population trend data through hunter harvest records, hunter surveys, and a variety of other methods for more than 25 years. Across the states, trend data like this has proven to be more than adequate to sustainably manage wild turkey populations. While we would all like nothing more than to have the ability to obtain a total count of turkeys in a given area, that technology currently does not exist. Some strides have been made to estimate turkey abundance on a local level, but they do not translate to a statewide or even county-wide level. Spending money on population surveys, as suggested in SB 412, is not a good investment for the management of the wild turkey. The Michigan DNR is currently gathering adequate information to make management decisions affecting the wild turkey population. The proposed SB 412 will result in a tremendous expense, both in money and manpower, to provide little additional information that can be used to monitor the population and make management and harvest recommendations.

I would be happy to provide more information if necessary. Thank you for your dedication to the wild turkey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James Earl Kennamer".

James Earl Kennamer, Ph.D.
Chief Conservation Officer
National Wild Turkey Federation

JEK/jp/kie